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# Greece's Turkish Dilemmas: There and Back Again ...

Kostas Ifantis\*

*The author attempts to explain the dilemmas of Greece's two traditional strategies vis-à-vis Turkey: those of containment and engagement. He posits that neither strategy fully satisfies Greece's foreign policy concerns, and suggests that a policy of 'balancing engagement' might be what the country needs. Such a strategy should aim to preserve the hope inherent in engagement policy while deterring Turkey from becoming hostile and hedging against the possibility that a strong Turkey might challenge Greek interests.*

## Introduction

Turkey's international value is beyond doubt: a regional actor whose economic potential, the size of its territory and population and its geopolitical location all make it likely that it will remain a key player in the regional scene for some time to come. Greece is faced with this reality. Although since 1999 the two countries have experienced a quite dynamic period of détente, Greek–Turkish differences remain unresolved and nobody can credibly claim that the 'Aegean Cold War' is historically over. Continuing disputes over the Aegean, over Cyprus, in relations with NATO, and in areas of bilateral and multilateral relations with other regional and extra-regional actors, all have the potential to severely threaten bilateral and regional peace, security and stability. The history of the two countries' relations shows that such a situation might repeat itself in an easier manner than many think. The history of crises between the two countries shows the ease with which, under tension, the situation in the Aegean may rapidly degenerate into large-scale security competition and open hostility.

Given this uncertainty, which is reinforced by the fragile process of Turkey towards the European Union (EU), the challenge to Greek policy has been to find a posture that can encourage positive evolution in Greek–Turkish relations and appropriately respond to any negative developments in the short or medium term, while also

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protecting Greece against the possibility that, in the longer term, Greek–Turkish relations may return to a rather uncertain and unstable course.

In Greek public debate, although there is a dominant, deep-rooted perception about Turkish behaviour and (revisionist) foreign policy aims, there is a lack of consensus on what strategy can best achieve national strategic purposes. The central question in the debate, after the process of rapprochement started in 1999 with the EU decision to grant Turkey the candidate status, is whether Greece should pursue, abandon or modify what seems to be a strategy of engagement with Turkey. Many in Greece have argued that since no substantive progress has been made in the bilateral relations and in Ankara's human rights record, the engagement strategy, especially as practiced after 1999, is doomed to fail. Some strongly believe that Turkey will never stop being a major threat to Greece and that constraining or balancing the growth of Turkish power should become (again) the overriding focus of Greek strategy. In effect, they imply that Greece must return to an exclusively containment policy.

Greece in the 2000s, however, seems committed to a process of 'step-by-step' engagement, at the heart of which is its support for Turkey's European vocation. Athens believe that this strategy will produce many benefits by moderating the Greek–Turkish interaction, increasing opportunities for trade and investment and improving the situation in Turkey itself through its modernising 'struggling' with European integration challenges. It is rather obvious to any student of Greek foreign policy and Greek–Turkish relations that the policy-making and academic communities in Greece have been, and remain, to a certain extent polarised because they approach Greek–Turkish relations through the competing prisms of containment and engagement.

The aim of this article is, first, to show that both strategies have serious limitations, which are the result of a profound misreading of the new international and regional strategic environment. Neither is adequate for dealing with Turkey, which in the framework of Greek perception is still a power characterised by a profound democratic deficit—by western standards—in its internal workings, which at times pursues policies that Greeks believe to be aggressive in nature, and whose future orientation remains uncertain. Also neither point out the fundamental requirements for an effective strategy towards Turkey—one that can effectively result in supporting Turkey's modernisation efforts; enhance the process of stabilisation and democratisation at the wider regional level; and strengthen Greek economic, political and, above all, military capabilities, thus reinforcing a stabilising balance of power arrangement in the Aegean. Such a balance-of-power arrangement is a *sine qua non* factor for the steady advancement of the normalisation process, at least in the short and medium run. The overall objective of Greek policy-makers should be the gradual reduction and eventual abolishment of the strategic competition between the two countries, and the advancement, at the same time, of cooperative and even integrative arrangements. The latter refers to reaching a stage—over time—where common assessments and common policies in an ever-expanding issue agenda can be adopted.

In that context, the discussion focuses in turn on the following: First, the identification of the fundamental characteristics of Turkish–Greek relations as these have been shaped since the early 1990s. A description of the Greek–Turkish problems and their

historical development is very well known and, thus, the focus is on the impact of the systemic change on the international and regional role, position and behaviour of the two actors as well as on the transitional constellations of power. Second, the central strategic question confronting Greece is its interaction with Turkey. What are the principal threats to Greek interests? How can those interests best be defended? What combination of economic, diplomatic and other instruments should be used to protect and advance Greek interests? What is the role of the United States and the EU?

## **Greece and Turkey in the Post-Cold War Reality**

### *The Greek Context*

When the Cold war ended, Turkey and Greece found themselves in a new strategic situation. For Greece, the end of the Cold War and the global transformation forced an urgent need to learn and re-adjust. Cold War stability was replaced by post-Cold War uncertainty and turbulence, which affected the country's northern neighbourhood. Less than orderly political transitions, bankrupt economies, sharp ethnic conflicts and border disputes on Greece's northern periphery threatened and challenged regional stability and vital national interests.

Throughout the post-1974 period, Greece's national strategy had been based on containing what Greek elites and public opinion perceived as the 'threat from the East'. The end of the Cold War added to the Greek security dilemma by replacing a static regional environment with a tremendously unstable one. Athens had to deal with the disintegration of Yugoslavia and other complex regional issues. Greek governments failed to formulate a coherent and effective Balkan policy, and thus failed to play an important role in the resolution of the crisis. Instead, for at least one-half of the 1990s, to a certain extent, Greece became part of the problem. Athens' inability to grasp the complexity of the situation was colossal. The complexity of actors, roles, policies and perceived interests resulted in a considerable security anxiety in Greece, which led to a policy without basic direction, coherence and well-assessed goals.

The situation reversed itself in the mid-1990s when Greece seemed to rediscover its role and expand its capabilities to respond successfully to the regional challenges. In the post-Dayton era, Greek foreign policy-makers have been attempting to play a stabilising role in the Balkan region by formulating a more comprehensive and cooperative approach to the region's problems. The endeavour to define and pursue an appropriate strategy continued, with considerable success, in the Kosovo crisis. Although plagued by problems of structural adjustment and with a serious deficit of healthy export-led growth, Greece's upgraded role in Southeastern Europe is based on its strong economic performance. Solid progress over the second half of the 1990s guaranteed Greece's participation in the European Monetary Union—the 'hard core' of the European integration process—as well as a constructive and continuing presence on the regional scene.

Greek policy towards Turkey, however, represents, strategically, the most impressive response to the new setting. The perception of the 'Turkish threat', a 'political heritage' of the years since 1974, has taken on a different and more complex form, given the new

post-Cold War geopolitical realities affecting Turkey's international position and its internal development. For Athens, although Ankara remained the main focus of its security and foreign policy concerns, Greek security policy vis-à-vis Turkey began changing in the late 1990s due to Greece's new strategic needs and priorities: mainly its ability to fully integrate into the EU (Tsakonas 2001a). The core of the new approach has been the identification of the EU as the most effective alignment to be utilised in the quest for a highly sophisticated 'external balancing' strategy vis-à-vis Turkey (Ifantis 2002: 258).<sup>1</sup> The EU Helsinki summit (December 1999) was the departure point for engaging Turkey in a context where Greece has been enjoying a comparative advantage, thus making the EU a major determinant in Greek-Turkish relations, and thereby also somewhat diminishing traditional US leverage. As Marios Evriviades (2003: 246–247) has pointed out:

Working with the well-founded assumption that since 1987 Turkey's pre-eminent strategic goal has been integration into the European Union, Greece has responded with sophisticated strategy. This strategy linked Turkish progress with Brussels and with Greece's bilateral problems with Ankara and with Cyprus. This strategy would end up 'Europeanizing' Greece's problems with Turkey, but in effect 'Europeanized' Greece's foreign policy and other policies as well. [...] 'Europeanization' of Greece would yield important dividends such as the opening wide the EU door for Cyprus and facilitating, ultimately, a Greek-Turkish rapprochement.

In principle, this strategy, still pursued today, seeks to maintain and enhance relations with Turkey as much as possible in various policy realms by using three elements. Regarding economics and trade, engagement has meant seeking an expansion of relations and the growth of exchanges. Politically, engagement seeks to maximise bilateral contacts at every level, while pushing back(stage) traditional disputes. Under this approach, Athens has been the most arduous supporter of Turkish EU membership, a major political risk for successive Greek governments. Militarily, Greece has agreed to an enhancement of military-to-military relations within the NATO framework, with the specific aim of increasing mutual confidence and reaching agreement on the 'rules of the game'. The overall approach rests on the hope that growing economic, political and military contacts and cooperation, as well as enmeshing Turkey in the European integration system, can socialise the powerful and sceptical part of the Turkish nationalist elites into European norms of behaviour and increase their stake in a course of reform. The successful EU-Turkish engagement is a definite 'relative-gain' project for Turkey (vis-à-vis Europe). As such, Turkish elites and public opinion feel that the arduous course of reform and modernisation clearly pays off. That greatly contributes to the attractiveness and popularity of the European orientation in Turkey.

At the same time, the 'Helsinki strategy' has compelled Europe to pay closer attention to areas and issues of concern to Athens—the most important of which is Cyprus—and has increasingly 'Europeanised' the question of Athens' Turkish policy, to a certain extent balancing out the overwhelming US security influence. Turkey's European aspirations seem to be directly tied to a resolution of its differences with Greece over the Aegean and Cyprus (Larrabee & Lesser 2003: 72).

*The Turkish Context Post-Cold War*

For Turkey, the collapse of the Cold War order has had enormous adverse repercussions on an entirely different front: cohesion in the western world. For Ankara, this has meant less confidence in the willingness and ability of major NATO allies to continue business as usual with Turkey. Developments in the East outpaced whatever meagre prospects Turkey might have enjoyed in Western-European eyes. America's traditionally strong military relationship with Turkey was called into question; economic and military assistance programmes were reduced and eventually zeroed out. Even cash purchases of arms and equipment became subject to US congressional holds. In short, the changing geopolitical environment in the late 1980s and early 1990s presented Turkey with many new challenges. These included a fragmentation of power along its northern and northeastern borders following the strategic withdrawal of Soviet/Russian power; the multiplication of political actors in the wider Eurasian region; the emergence of, and, in some cases, intensification of, local conflicts with the potential to escalate into larger regional conflicts; and the absence of an easily conceived and articulated threat, further isolating Turkey from mainstream European political and economic developments.

At that time, the quest for a new role, that of peacemaker and regional stabiliser, began. President Özal went on to define Turkey as a model for the region because of its unique combination of characteristics: Islamic, democratic, secular and, above all, stable in the midst of a disintegrating region ranging from the Balkans, to the former USSR, to the Middle East. The Gulf War simply revalidated Turkey's self-definition and role in this context (Coufoudakis 1993: 394). Security debates in the United States and Europe acknowledge Turkey's geopolitical significance and the need to reinvigorate relations with Ankara. But there has been relatively little progress in defining what a new agenda for strategic cooperation between Turkey and the West should include. It seems that the relationship between Turkey and the West still lacks a clear sense of direction. Uncertainty remains as to what big issues parties can work for, or against, in a new strategic environment.

Special reference must be also made to the concept of Turkey as a 'pivotal state'. Turkey fulfils all the requirements of a pivotal state: population, location, and economic and military potential. Its defining quality, however, is the potential to affect regional and international stability. Turkey's significance lies not only in its geostrategic value, but also in the destabilisation and uncertainty that the (even remote) possibility of its decline might result in (Chase et al. 1996: 33–51).

The regional balance, and for that reason the geostrategic value and role of Turkey, will continue to depend on a number of factors, which seemingly contribute—albeit unevenly—to either enhancing or diminishing Turkey's role in regional and world politics, in the framework of US foreign policy and security interests. The most important of these factors is Turkey's relations with the United States and its position in the wider American security strategic plan, shaped by the future development of: relations between the United States/West and Iraq (and Iran), especially after the successful campaign against Baghdad and the occupation of Iraq; relations between the West and

Russia, as well as the general foreign and security policy goals of Moscow; and Turkish–Russian relations, especially in the strategic environment of the Caucasus and Central Asia. It will also be subject to: the continuation and intensification of the conventional arms race in the region and the horrifying prospect of weapons of mass destruction proliferation; the stability prospects of Central Asian countries and the security of the oil routes; and the future of the EU–Turkish relationship and the prospects of membership. Finally, the issue of Turkish national power itself, with reference to not only the military dimension, but mainly to the political, economic and social development of the country. This factor is of critical importance and is connected to the management of internal political, economic and social uncertainties.

The 1999 general elections produced a nationalist coalition of the right and the left, with a sharp decline in support for centrist parties and for the Islamic political agents. The consolidation of military influence in defence of the secular state, which began with the removal of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) from power and its banning from Turkish politics, also means that the Turkish military remains a key interlocutor on foreign and security policy issues. Three years later, the Turkish general election of 3 November 2002 transformed the country's political landscape dramatically. None of the members of the outgoing governing coalition won seats in the new parliament. Since taking office in 1999, the coalition had been tarnished by a series of corruption scandals. Additionally, during its time in office, the country experienced the worst economic recession in 50 years.<sup>2</sup> The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), formed in mid-2001, came to power with 34.3 per cent of the vote and a massive majority of 363 seats in the 550-member parliament. The centre-left Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), after its disastrous performance in the 1999 election, emerged as the second party with 19.4 per cent of the vote and 178 seats. Another nine seats were won by independents with all other political parties failing to cross the 10 per cent threshold (Jenkins 2003: 55–55; see Carkoglu 2003).<sup>3</sup> The indications of transition turbulence are strong and have been identified and assessed at an early stage:

The 'democratisation process' that has been intensified by the decisions taken at the European Summit in Helsinki, and elaborated on a short and medium-term basis in the Accession Partnership that followed, will seriously affect Turkish domestic politics in many ways. Specifically, democratisation is expected to be the driving force behind turbulence in Turkey's domestic politics, which is highly likely to undermine the country's democratisation project and affect its external behaviour. This turbulence in domestic politics will mainly concern the eruption of a set of domestic shocks at the state and society level, being portrayed as elite turbulence, societal turbulence and economic turbulence. (Tsakonas 2001b: 10–11)

In this regard, the future conduct of Turkish foreign policy, and the future of Turkey as a security partner for the West, might be driven to some extent by domestic developments. 'Even if the overall direction of Turkish policy remains steady and pro-Western, Turkey's ability to play an active role in adjoining regions [...] will depend on political stability in Ankara' (Lesser 2000: 27–28). That entails a smooth modernisation phase with a clear European future for Turkey. The policy implications for Washington and Athens have been profound.



## The Challenge of Change

In the context of the effects that systemic transformation had on Turkey and Greece, what need to be assessed are the implications of the new structural changes. What is, and how important is, the role of the USA? Given Turkey's potential to pose a political–military challenge to Greece, as well as the uncertainty about the future course it will follow, how should Greece deal with it? What Greek actions can both encourage Turkey to follow a more cooperative policy and prepare Greece for the possibility that it will not? To the extent that these two objectives may come into conflict, how should Greece strike a balance between them?

### *Conditions and Actors*

Objectively, there can be little strategic rationale for premeditated conflict between Greece and Turkey. Open conflict would pose enormous political risks for both of them, quite apart from uncertainties at the operational level. Yet the risk of an accidental clash remains, given the continuing armed air and naval operations in close proximity and the highly charged atmosphere surrounding competing claims (Lesser 2000: 32). The Aegean, and especially Cyprus, are the sensitive national questions *par excellence*. Moreover, with both countries modernising their military capabilities, the potential for destructiveness and escalation is far greater today than in the past. A Greek–Turkish clash would have profound implications for Turkey and the West. It would also have operational consequences for the United States. In strategic terms, a conflict under current conditions might result in an open-ended estrangement of Turkey from the West, since the Cold War imperatives that argued for restraint in sanctions against Turkey in 1974 are absent today. More broadly, a Greek–Turkish conflict might encourage ‘civilizational’ cleavages in the West (Lesser 2000: 32). The risk of a clash and the probable strategic and operational consequences make risk reduction an imperative for the United States (and NATO). The same is true for the EU.

The relative stagnation in EU–Turkish relations, despite the decisions taken by the EU to start accession talks with Turkey, has also contributed to the sense of disappointment and uncertainty, and has made Turkish behaviour towards Greece more unpredictable and perhaps harder for the United States to control. If Turkey cannot strengthen its relationship with the EU—in the context of future membership—it cannot successfully pursue its legitimate foreign policy goals. For the EU it would be a disaster to ‘lose’ Turkey, but how to properly bind it to Europe seems not very clear. The EU–Turkish relations have always been complex. For many decades, Turkey has been a critical part of the European system; that is, part of the pattern of European political, economic, and security relations. The question of whether Turkey is part of the European integration project is far less clear. ‘Despite a strong preference for a European orientation since the founding of the Republic, Turkey’s own sense of identity in this regard has varied with time’ (Khalilzad et al. 2000: 2). The sense of ambiguity and ambivalence in the EU–Turkish relations remains and raises as many questions as it resolves. Is the EU serious about the prospect of Turkish membership? Can the EU



deal effectively with the economic, political, and 'scale' challenges posed by such an enlargement? Is Turkey really prepared for the enormous sovereignty compromises that integration implies?

The challenge for Turkey is enormous. So far, Turkish elites have not had to confront the dilemma posed by a strong nationalist tradition and a powerful attachment to state sovereignty, on the one hand, with the prospect of integration in a sovereignty-diluting EU, on the other. The accession process implies a great institutionalised scrutiny, convergence and compromise. From the least political issues (e.g. food regulations) to high politics, a closer relationship with formal EU structures will pose tremendous pressures on traditional Turkish concepts of sovereignty at many levels. It is a process that has been difficult for all member states of the EU. Surrendering sovereignty has been one of the most fundamental elements of the European integration success. For an EU member state, pursuing nationalist options outside the integration context has become extremely difficult, if not impossible.

If there is a 'European spirit', it more than anything else reveals the need—for both countries—for a more strategic approach towards each other. Both countries have a longer-term strategic interest in seeing Turkey's EU vocation succeed. Such a success has the potential of changing Greece's perception of threat, and fostering political and economic reform in a Turkey reassured about its place in Europe. Everybody involved will benefit from a more effective and predictable strategic partnership with Turkey. A key task for the EU and US foreign policy elites will be to make sure that Greek–Turkish brinkmanship no longer threatens broader interests in regional détente and integration. The stakes of bringing to fruition this strategy of reciprocal accommodation are extremely high (Kupchan 2000: 9).

However, such a rapprochement remains fragile (and to a certain degree nascent) for three main reasons. First, the strong view in Athens is that most of the changes have come on the Greek side. There has been no major shift in Turkish policy. Without a Turkish gesture to match Greece's lifting of its veto to Turkey's EU candidacy, it may prove difficult for Athens to maintain domestic support over the long run.

Indeed, successive Greek governments since 1999 have operated with the benefit of the doubt, even within their own party confines. Second, the rapprochement has so far been limited to less-controversial areas such as trade, the environment and tourism. The really sensitive issues have yet to be addressed. The current climate will prove its durability only when these issues are included in the reconciliation agenda. Finally, there is the issue of Cyprus. While Cyprus is technically not a bilateral dispute, it is an integral element of the broader fabric of the relationship and cannot be ignored. Although there is a politically costly effort to downplay the linkage by Athens, without progress on Cyprus the current rapprochement will be impossible to sustain over time (Larrabee 2000: 15).

### **The role of the United States**

The United States has traditionally been the most important 'third' actor in the Aegean. To the extent that Turkish incorporation into the EU remains an open question for

years to come, the Turkish–US–Greek entanglement becomes even more complex. In the context of Greek–US relations, the analysis was in the past shaped predominantly by the Greek–Turkish debate. This was appropriate given the pre-eminent perception of the Turkish threat in Greece since 1974, but the rhetoric of this debate continues to shape both Greek and American thinking and strategy. As a result, the issue of US leadership—whether the United States can continue to fulfil a balancing role or whether there should be a different American approach and, subsequently, a different Greek response—has always been prominent.

The Washington approach was always a pragmatic one, since no American initiative has succeeded in achieving the normalisation of Greek–Turkish relations. That is why the United States has not been as actively as one might have expected involved in the search for a solution. Moreover, during the Cold War, successive US administrations felt that the Aegean issues were not as acute as some others, and therefore were placed well down the list of Washington’s priorities. Although the dispute was recognised as posing a threat to NATO’s southeastern flank, the primary objective of US foreign policy elites was to control Greek–Turkish tensions and the administration of the implications of the problem for the function of the Alliance (see Krebs 1999: 343–377; Alford 1984; Brown 1991; Couloumbis 1983; Stearns 1992). For decades, a major failure of US foreign policy has been its inability to get its two allies astride the Aegean to settle their differences through compromise and cooperation. In the framework of NATO, the augmented emphasis placed on the Mediterranean stability necessitated, more than ever, a cohesive southeastern flank free from the Greek–Turkish impasse (Papacosma 1999: 61–62).

Of all the issues, however, what has added the most to the complexity of the triangular arena has been the impact on US–Turkish relations of the American military intervention in Iraq in the spring of 2003. For the United States, the Middle East remains an area of vital importance. Turkey’s strategic significance is powerfully defined by its centrality to a region of major instability and conflagration. The Iraq war so far has proved to be a watershed. Although Turkey will remain a key country for the United States for the foreseeable future, it is widely held that the partnership between Washington and Ankara will inevitably necessitate the shaping of a new agenda, which would reflect the reality of the regime change and the large US military presence in Iraq and in the wider region.

Washington’s unilateral and ‘military’ approach to the Iraqi regime issue was certain to be viewed with uneasiness in Ankara. The adverse effect that the crisis was expected to have on Turkey’s security exacerbated Ankara’s discomfort. As early as July 2002, the United States had made clear that, in the event of war, US plans would involve launching attacks from southeastern Turkey. Visiting Turkey on 3 December 2002, US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz laid out the ground attack plans and asked Turkey to allow: the use of its joint air bases; the stationing of 80,000 or more US troops in Turkey; and the transit of these troops to northern Iraq in order to establish a second front. Developments in Iraqi Kurdistan following the 1990–91 Gulf War and the potential ramifications of the Kurdish issue in the US war with Iraq constituted a great headache for Ankara (Park 2003: 1–12). Tension between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds

was particularly high concerning the fate of the Kirkuk and Mosul oil fields, as well as the possibility of the United States arming Kurdish fighters (Park 2003: 6). This was the fundamental security concern that prevented Ankara from adhering to Washington's war plans and strategic agenda.

It was, therefore, almost natural that the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) Government policy towards US war preparations and the prospect of a post-Saddam, 'federal' Iraq would come under tremendous pressure. Nevertheless, it was widely assumed that at the critical moment Ankara would have no choice but to support Washington logistically and, probably, militarily (Robins 2003: 560). However, by mid-December 2002, the mood of the Turkish elites was changing. The level of distrust of the West further increased following the disappointing outcome at Copenhagen. As Philip Robins (2003: 561) posited, 'the old ghosts of the early 1920s also began to stir, notably the so-called Sevres Syndrome, a Turkish preoccupation with renewed attempts by the great powers to remake the Middle East to Turkey's great disadvantage'. The Turkish General Staff finally submitted detailed plans for potential Turkish support for a US military campaign to the National Security Council meeting of 31 January 2003, although it stipulated that any decision would have to be approved by the Turkish parliament. On 1 March 2003, the Turkish parliament rejected the resolution and with it Washington's war requests by a margin of just three votes. Tied together with American war requests was a massive US aid package—including US\$6 billion in grants convertible to up to US\$24 billion in low-interest, long-term loans. In an extremely belated and watered-down version, Parliament voted on 20 March to grant the US military over-flight privileges, making Turkey the last NATO ally to grant such rights to the United States (Parks 2003: 8).

While 9/11 had served to strengthen the US–Turkish strategic partnership by once more elevating Turkey's value to the war against terrorism, the cleavage over Iraq meant that anxieties resurfaced and questions were raised about Turkey's geopolitical destiny. According to Morton Abramowitz, 'Turkey has endangered the whole westward edifice of its policies. It has taken positions that have left it, at least momentarily, without the strong support of major western allies.'<sup>4</sup> Following these events, the American press criticised Ankara sharply. Since then Turkish–US relations have been experiencing a quick and dramatic deterioration. The incorporation of a US\$1 billion supplement for Turkey into the US war budget and an early April 2003 fence-mending visit to Ankara by US Secretary of State Colin Powell indicated that Turkey remains a strategically located NATO ally. It should be noted, however, that the Pentagon, hitherto Ankara's most ardent advocate in Washington, has been reported to be the most frustrated. As Park (2003: 9) notes:

There will be many in the Pentagon who will remain conscious of the consequences of Turkish non-cooperation. For America's military planners, what good is Turkey's strategic location if it is unavailable to US troops? Furthermore, should a stable and pro-western regime emerge in Baghdad, Iraq could offer Washington an oil-rich, grateful and still more strategically located regional alternative to Turkey. In the foreseeable future, it is less likely that the Pentagon will be quite so willing to lobby on Turkey's behalf. [...] The United

States is now more indebted to Iraqi Kurds, and Ankara is less well placed to have a say in post-Saddam arrangements in Iraq, as a consequence of Turkey's failure to cooperate.

All of the aforementioned indicates that the relationship between Turkey and the United States faces pressures to change, some of them severe. As Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrates, US involvement and its growing military presence in the wider Middle East can pose dilemmas for Turkey, and that interpretations of security concerns do not always coincide. At a fundamental level, Turkish and American interests are broadly convergent, and the bilateral relationship remains heavily focused on security. Although this is hardly going to change given the character of the regional environment and the continuing involvement of the United States, increasing distrust between Washington and Ankara further adds to the pressure on Turkish security dilemmas, especially since vital Turkish national interests remain subject to Washington's pivotal role as security arbiter in the adjacent regions. For Athens, critical Greek security stakes turn on external variables, such as Turkey's relationship with Washington (and Brussels), and the impact on the Greek–Turkish bilateral agenda can be enormous, however narrowly (or widely) this agenda is defined. More than ever, the need for a comprehensive Greek strategy is great.

#### **Athens' Strategic Dilemmas (Ifantis 2004)<sup>5</sup>**

As has been pointed out earlier, the Greek foreign policy and academic elites as well as the public opinion are polarised because they approach Greek–Turkish relations through the competing prisms of containment and engagement. On the basis of the earlier structural and systemic assessment of the two countries' positioning and power location in the new international setting, and given the deeply rooted belief in Greece that reconciliation passes through Turkey's policy responses and internal reform, it is that neither strategy serves the key Greek objective, which should be to encourage Turkey to become more democratic and cooperative, while at the same time protecting Greek interests in case Turkey becomes more hostile.

#### *Engagement as a Strategy*

In principle, engagement seeks to maintain and enhance relations with Turkey as much as possible in the various policy realms. Strictly speaking, engagement is a tactic rather than a policy: it refers to the means—increasing contact and producing a rather dense network of relationships—rather than the objectives. In practice, however, it embodies some assumptions about how such a tactic will achieve certain objectives.

Engagement rests on the hope that growing economic, political and military contacts and cooperation will either transform Turkey into being more democratic (with the functional impetus of the EU) and cooperative, or, at a minimum, bring some kind of interest convergence. For Greece, enmeshing Turkey in the European integration system can socialise the (powerful) sceptical part of the Turkish elites into the European norms of behaviour and increase their stake in a reforming course. The more Turkey is integrated into the European system, the less likely it will be to use force.

Rather, it will act as a prudent and responsible member of the system, once it becomes accustomed to the 'rules of the game' and understands the benefits that it can bestow. For some, this is a bold assumption: that continued contact would eventually affect Turkish behaviour towards Greece in a positive direction.

In the meantime, it is a fact that Greek (and European) engagement is helping Turkey develop economically. Thus, should the Greek–Turkish relations course remain hostile, the engagement approach will merely have made Turkey into a potentially more threatening adversary. The problem is that engagement does not have any positive suggestions on what should be done when things go wrong. At most, engagement indicates what should not be done. It does not indicate how Greece should respond when Turkish actions come into conflict with Greek interests. A strong view in Greece is that Athens does not really have an alternative policy or, at a minimum, no parallel responses are available. In the context of this type of criticism, it may be very difficult for any Greek government to obtain and sustain domestic consensus for such a strategy.

### *Containment as a Strategy*

Some have suggested that a containment strategy would be a more realistic way to deal with Turkey. The goal of such a policy would be to avoid an increase in Turkey's political, economic and diplomatic power relative to that of Greece. This would include efforts to slow down the development of Turkey's relations with the EU, thus limiting its expansion of influence. Containment assumes that allowing Turkey to expand its relations with Europe will not change its behaviour, but rather it will embolden its leadership, making an eventual clash with Greece even more likely. Thus, even modest progress of the EU–Turkish relations should be resisted. Under containment, all elements of Turkish–Greek relations would be subordinate to the goal of preventing the growth of Turkey's European (and international) standing. A policy of containment assumes that the impasse in Turkish–Greek relations will remain. The argument is that, given its political tradition of Kemalist nationalism, Turkey is unlikely to democratise, or that, even if it did, its policy would not become less bellicose, since it would have to respond to the nationalist passions of a large part of both its elites and populace. Therefore, Greece should both demonstrate its resolve to deter Turkey and take steps to prepare for a conflict should deterrence fail.

Obviously, shifting to an exclusively containment strategy is even more troublesome and self-defeating. Such a strategy assumes that Turkey will ultimately become even more hostile, giving short shrift to the possibility that Greek–Turkish relations could evolve in a more cooperative direction. In any case, such a policy might very well cause Turkey to become more hostile than it otherwise would be by intensifying the already hard security dilemma in the Aegean. The underlying prediction of hostility can become a self-fulfilling prophecy setting the stage for a confrontation where none would otherwise have occurred. In general, containment seems to accept a fatality that does not appear to be inevitable.

*Striking a Balance, or the Need for Sophistication*

With this in mind, Greek policy should transcend both containment and engagement. The best strategic option must be able to accomplish three things: preserve the hope inherent in engagement policy, while deterring Turkey from becoming hostile and hedging against the possibility that a strong Turkey might challenge Greek interests. Such a strategy could be called 'balancing engagement'. It would continue to try to bring Turkey into the European integration orbit while giving equal attention to deterrence and preparing for a possible Turkish challenge to the bilateral arrangements, while seeking to convince the Turkish leadership that such a challenge would be difficult to prepare and extremely risky to pursue. With Turkey entangled in the EU accession process, such a policy not only is desirable but is possible as well. It is possible because the insertion of the EU in the Greek–Turkish relations is a factor arguing for an optimistic view, a view that supports pursuing such a policy.

Three points should be made. First, in the context of the assumption that Turkey successfully modernises under EU benevolent tutelage, the Turkish leadership could further develop an emphasis on the importance of good relations with Greece and Europe. The modernisation process will not have a clear-cut end point, and the Turkish elites as well as the Turkish society may still feel the need to 'catch up'. Second, the opening of Turkey to Europe increases the possibility of a transformation of the Turkish polity in a more democratic direction. The best idea may win out. Although the process of modernisation could still produce aggressive external behaviour, the growth and consolidation of a genuine liberal democracy could lead Turkey to pursue peaceful and cooperative relations with other democracies. Third, the successful EU–Turkish engagement is a definite 'relative-gain' project for Turkey (vis-à-vis Europe). As such, Turkish elites and public opinion would feel that the arduous course of reform and modernisation clearly pays off. That greatly contributes to the attractiveness and popularity of the European orientation in Turkey.

At the same time, under a strategy of 'balancing engagement', Greece should enhance economic, political, military-to-military relations and cultural ties at all levels. This may help curb any tendencies towards military adventurism that might crop up from time to time. Since there is potential for conflict with Turkey over issues such as Cyprus and the Aegean, and since Ankara might seek regional hegemony, as a hedge Greece should 'aggressively' move on four fronts. First, push Turkey deeper and deeper into the difficult but modernising alleys of the integration process. However, prospects for Turkey to ascend to the EU will now depend far more on reform process and its substance domestically. Second, lead the way for a stable and democratic regional (Balkan and Mediterranean) subsystem. Third, lock Turkey into various strong multi-lateral regimes that have been created to accommodate and satisfy national needs. Finally, seek to strengthen Greek economic, political and, above all, military capabilities, thus making the risk of escalation—following a possible Turkish fait accompli (e.g. in Cyprus)—extremely high for Ankara. It should be indicated that such a strategy is agnostic of some of the key judgements about Turkey's future—for example, whether Turkey's enmeshing in the European integration system will modify its long-term



objectives and behaviour, enhance the process of democratisation, or inevitably pursue an aggressive policy and challenge the status quo—as perceived by Greeks—in the Aegean. Instead, this strategy can sharpen the fundamental choice faced by a country with very few alternative strategic options, to cooperate for achieving mutual accommodation, partnership and, eventually, friendship.

## Conclusion

Greece and Turkey share common land and sea borders and they both have extensive coastlines along the Aegean Sea. The geographic imperatives of both countries can moderate actions as well as provoke them. These imperatives are long term and can transcend governments and ruling elites. They are also interconnected, so that if one imperative is altered it will probably affect others. A sincere and viable rapprochement status between Turkey and Greece can only be the outcome of a novel bilateral structural arrangement that would entail two fundamental elements. First, there should be a gradual and constant redefinition of the two countries' national interests, which would allow a historic convergence of interest-based strategies. This process is possible considering the two actors' current power locations, as well as the interplay at their respective domestic levels. That means that the presence of large socio-political majorities that favour the current process is vital and must be sustained at any cost. Second, it is imperative that for, at least, as long as the process of rapprochement remains fragile and weak, a 'healthy', transparent and thus stabilising balance of power should remain the overarching principle of the bilateral structure. Such a structural constraint would, above all, make the cost of an even accidental clash extremely high, while adding, at the same time, value to the rapprochement hard efforts. What underlies the overall argument of the article is the certainty that when the risks of competition exceed the risks of cooperation, rational state-actors should direct their self-help efforts towards achieving cooperation. Ultimately, the choice for rapprochement and high levels of cooperation, under the right conditions and with the right motives, is an optimal 'self-help' strategy for both states, in a highly unstable Eastern Mediterranean. The prospects for a lasting détente will definitely be influenced by the longer-term evolution of the foreign and security policy priorities on all sides, the dynamics of EU integration and NATO strategic adjustment, as well as more stability in southeastern Europe, the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Turkey's (and Greece's) strategic environment will be strongly influenced by the evolution of US regional, security and defence policies beyond the Gulf, and especially the global campaign against terrorism (Larrabee & Lesser 2003: 7). The role of the United States is nothing less than vital for making and sustaining more positive regional security settings. Policy-makers in both countries should pursue a strategy that aims at reducing the risks and remove the possibility of armed conflict altogether—not only because war will result in an isolation of both from their western institutional affiliations, but also because the consequences for their economic and social development will be devastating. The differences are not intractable, especially if there is political incentive on both sides to see them resolved.



Overall, the two countries are much better off today in terms of bilateral relations than they were a few years ago. Under a (delicate) spirit of rapprochement reigning between the two countries, the prospects for a crisis and tension have been drastically curtailed and new uncharted territory for peaceful coexistence, transactions and communication has opened. Having said that, it should not be forgotten that there has been no real attempt to address the fundamental differences between the two countries. This is sustainable in the longer run. The longer the bilateral relations remain uncertain, the easier it becomes to return to the dangerous pre-1999 status of protracted tension. The difficult issues that continued to divide and haunt both countries should be addressed, sooner or later. It should be noted, however, that good planning and patience are vital prerequisites. Nobody should expect that decades of animosity and hatred could be overcome. Perceptions need to be changed, but this will happen gradually. Trust must be built, and bureaucracies and populations must be prepared for change. Nobody should forget that these are not issues for interested parties to experiment with, and it is counterproductive to pressure either country into taking too many risks without having a good expectation of the outcome. Stable relations do mean abandoning or compromising national interests. The process has been rather costless so far, but real progress could be forthcoming in a well-planned and sincere strategic interaction.

## Notes

- [1] At the same time, the 'internal balancing' needs were catered for through a series of decisions in favour of rapid change and improvement of the Greek security and defence planning system. The focus has been on overall strategic planning and reshaping of the defence doctrine, restructuring of the armed forces, military spending and military diplomacy. Regarding the defence doctrine, the solution to the strategic dilemma that Greece faced was the adoption of a 'flexible response', meaning the creation of additional choices in crisis management. The theoretical elaboration of the new doctrine is still in process, since it is a multifaceted matter of major political and strategic significance with multiple parameters and consequences. Concerning armaments, the defence doctrine revision required the intensification of defence efforts; that is, an increase in the amount of resources devoted to defence. In 1996, an armaments programme worth almost 15 billion was agreed upon and implemented in the following five years. In 2000, a second five-year (2001–2005) programme was agreed upon, which, if implemented in full, will amount to more than 20 billion. Throughout this period, Greek military procurement put exclusive emphasis on the acquisition of modern weaponry and the development of high-quality defence capabilities (C4, force multipliers, etc.).
- [2] During 2001, the Turkish economy contracted by 9.4 per cent, resulting in over a million redundancies and forcing the government to agree to a painful International Monetary Fund-sponsored economic stabilisation programme.
- [3] The three parties in the coalition government saw their total vote fall to 14.7 per cent from 53.4 per cent in 1999. Additionally, the opposition leaders were voted out. Tansu Ciller's True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*) won just 9.6 per cent of the vote, as compared with 12 per cent in 1999.
- [4] Frank Bruni, 'For Turkey, uncertainty over which road to take', *International Herald Tribune*, 1 April 2003, p. 3.
- [5] This part draws heavily on Kostas Ifantis (2004).

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